

Aruba's ONLY English newspaper

## Americans sour on the primary election process and major political parties

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and LINLEY SANDERS

Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — With the GOP presidential primaries just about to start, many Republicans aren't certain that votes will be counted correctly in their contest, as pessimism spreads about the future of both the Democratic and Republican parties, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

About one-third of Republicans say they have a "great deal" or "quite a bit" of confidence that votes in the Republican primary elections and caucuses will be counted correctly. About three in 10 Republicans report a "moderate" amount of confidence, and 32% say they have "only a little" or "none at all." In contrast, 72% of Democrats have high confidence their party will count votes accurately in its primary contests. Democrats are also slightly more likely than Republicans to have a high level of confidence in the Republican Party's vote count being accurate. Republicans continue to be broadly doubtful about votes being counted accurately — in the early contests or beyond them.



Voters pass a sign outside a polling site in Warwick, R.I., on Nov. 7, 2022.

Associated Press

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## Americans sour on the primary election process and major political parties

Continued from Front

About one-quarter of Republicans say they have at least "quite a bit" of confidence that the votes in the 2024 presidential election will be counted accurately, significantly lower than Democrats. Slightly fewer than half of U.S. adults overall (46%) believe the same, which is in line with an AP-NORC poll conducted in June.

The skepticism among Republicans comes after years of former President Donald Trump falsely blaming his 2020 loss on election fraud. Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges Trump appointed. "Nothing will be fair because the last election was rigged," said Julie Duggan, 32, of Chicago, a Trump voter, referring to 2020. "I don't trust any of them at this point."

The AP-NORC poll found a widespread lack of trust in both major political parties among U.S. adults overall.



The White House is seen reflected in a puddle, Saturday, Sept. 3, 2022, in Washington.

Associated Press

About one-quarter of U.S. adults say they have "only a little" confidence or "none at all" that both the Democratic Party and Republican Party have a fair process for selecting a presidential nominee. About half of independents have that low level of confidence in both party's processes, compared with one-quarter of Republicans and 19% of Democrats.

Slightly fewer than half of U.S. adults — 46% — say they are pessimistic about the way the country's leaders are chosen. About half of U.S. adults are pessimistic about the future of the Republican Party, including one-third of Republicans and 45% of independents. The poll found 45% of U.S. adults are pessimistic about the future of the Democratic Party, including about one-

quarter of Democrats and 41% of independents.

"The way they're spending our money, sending it all over the world and not protecting our people here in the United States of America," said Gary Jackson, a 65-year-old retired trucker and Republican in Boise, Idaho. "Right now, I'm not impressed with either party."

Christine Allen, a political

independent in Gambrills, Maryland, sees her state's last governor, Larry Hogan, a moderate Republican, as a model for the country. But Hogan refused to run in the GOP presidential primary, which she sees as emblematic of how the two-party system prevents talented leaders from holding office, "Everybody right now is a bunch of children, stomping their feet until they get their way," Allen, 44, said. "Everybody's at fault here. There's no winners." Nonetheless, Allen thinks the primaries will be fair. "They're fairer than the Electoral College," she said.

Even those who identify with the two political parties are uneasy about whom their organizations will nominate. A recent AP-NORC poll found that Democrats and Republicans are also not especially confident that their party's primary contests will result in a candidate who can win the general election in November. Additionally, there are some doubts on both sides that the emerging candidates will represent their party's views or Americans overall. □



The bronze statue of a woman reading to two children is placed on pallets after being removed from the "Women of the Southland" monument in Jacksonville, Fla.'s Springfield Park on Wednesday morning, Dec. 27, 2023.

Associated Press

## Jacksonville, Florida, mayor has Confederate monument removed after years of controversy

**JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP)** — Crews removed a Confederate monument from a Jacksonville, Florida, park Wednesday morning following years of public controversy.

Mayor Donna Deegan ordered the removal of the "Tribute to the Women of the Southern Confederacy" monument, which has been in Springfield Park since 1915. She said the decision is not an attempt to erase history but to show that people have learned from it.

"Symbols matter. They tell the world what we stand for and what we aspire to be," Deegan said in a statement. "By removing the confederate monument from Springfield Park, we signal a belief in our shared humanity. That we are all created equal. The same flesh and bones. The same blood running through our veins. The same heart and soul."

Serious discussion of the monument's fate began in 2020 after Deegan's predecessor, Mayor Lenny Curry,

ordered the removal of another monument, a bronze statue of a Confederate soldier that had been in a downtown park for more than 100 years. The move came weeks after the death of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer and on the heels of marches and other calls for social justice.

A proposal to remove the Confederate women tribute was introduced to the Jacksonville City Council in 2021, but the Republican-controlled board never

moved on it. Earlier this month, Jacksonville's Office of General Counsel determined that city council approval was unnecessary because city funds were not being used for the work. As the city's top executive, Deegan, a Democrat, had the authority to order the statue's removal, city attorneys said.

The \$187,000 bill is being covered by a grant that the Jessie Ball duPont Fund and anonymous donors made to 904WARD, city officials said. □

# Michigan Supreme Court will keep Trump on 2024 primary ballot

By COREY WILLIAMS and NICHOLAS RICCARDI  
Associated Press

Michigan's Supreme Court is keeping former President Donald Trump on the state's primary election ballot.

The court said Wednesday it will not hear an appeal of a lower court's ruling from groups seeking to keep Trump from appearing on the ballot.

It said in an order that the application by parties to appeal a Dec. 14 Michigan appeals court judgment was considered, but denied "because we are not persuaded that the questions presented should be reviewed by this court."

The ruling contrasts with Dec. 19 decision by a divided Colorado Supreme Court which found Trump ineligible to be president because of his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. That ruling was the first time in history that Section 3 of the 14th Amendment has been used to disqualify a presidential candidate.

The Michigan and Colorado cases are among dozens hoping to keep Trump's name off state ballots. They



Former President Donald Trump listens as he speaks with reporters while in flight on his plane after a campaign rally at Waco Regional Airport, in Waco, Texas, March 25, 2023, while en route to West Palm Beach, Fla.

Associated Press

all point to the so-called insurrection clause that prevents anyone from holding office who "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" against the Constitution. Until the Colorado ruling, all had failed.

The Colorado ruling is likely to be appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, which has never ruled on the rarely used Civil War-era provi-

sion.

The plaintiffs in Michigan can technically try again to disqualify Trump under Section 3 of the 14th Amendment in the general election, though it's likely there will be a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on the issue by then. The state's high court on Wednesday upheld an appeals court ruling that the Republican

Party could place anyone it wants on the primary ballot. But the court was silent on whether Section 3 of the 14th Amendment would disqualify Trump in November if he becomes the GOP nominee.

"We are disappointed by the Michigan Supreme Court's decision," said Ron Fein, legal director of Free Speech for People, the lib-

eral group that filed the suit to disqualify Trump in the state. "The ruling conflicts with longstanding US Supreme Court precedent that makes clear that when political parties use the election machinery of the state to select, via the primary process, their candidates for the general election, they must comply with all constitutional requirements in that process."

Trump hailed the order, calling the effort to keep him off the ballot in multiple states a "pathetic gambit." Only one of the court's seven justices dissented. Justice Elizabeth M. Welch, a Democrat, wrote that she would have kept Trump on the primary ballot but the court should rule on the merits of the Section 3 challenge. The court has a 4-3 Democratic majority.

Trump pressed two election officials in Michigan's Wayne County not to certify 2020 vote totals, according to a recording of a post-election phone call disclosed in a Dec. 22 report by The Detroit News. The former president's 2024 campaign has neither confirmed nor denied the recording's legitimacy. □

# North Dakota lawmaker who used homophobic slurs during DUI arrest has no immediate plans to resign

By JACK DURA  
Associated Press

**BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) —** A North Dakota Republican lawmaker has no plans to immediately resign, despite party leaders' calls for him to step down after he railed against police with profane, homophobic and anti-migrant language during a recent traffic stop that ended in his arrest on a charge of drunken driving. In a statement Wednesday, Republican state Rep. Nico Rios, of Williston, said he is "seriously mulling all aspects" of his future.

"As I weigh my future in the legislature, I am going to spend the next few months addressing my issues with

alcoholism and getting the help I need," he said in a statement. "Any decision I make going forward will be made with a sober mind and deliberative clarity. To do so, I will be prioritizing breaking my chemical dependency on alcohol, improving the interpersonal relations I have strained, and listening to our community."

Rios also said he takes responsibility for his "disgusting actions" during the Dec. 15 traffic stop, and apologized "to those I have hurt and disappointed," including law enforcement officers. He added that he is "100% committed to making repairs for my actions

and straightening out my life."

Police body camera footage requested by and provided to the AP shows Rios cursing an officer, repeatedly questioning his English accent, and using homophobic slurs and anti-migrant language. He also said he would call the North Dakota attorney general about the situation. He told the officers they would "regret picking on me because you don't know who ... I am."

Rios' statement comes a day after Republican House Majority Leader Mike Lefor and state party officials publicly called on him to resign.



Body camera video captured North Dakota Republican lawmaker Nico Rios using profanity and homophobic slurs toward Williston police officers and threatening to call the state's attorney general during a DUI stop on Dec. 5, 2023, in Williston, N.D.

Associated Press

"There is no room in the legislature, or our party, for this behavior," Lefor said Tuesday. The AP left him a phone message on Wednesday seeking comment on Rios' decision.

Rios has said he was leaving a Christmas party before police pulled him over. He was charged with misdemeanor counts of

drunken driving and refusing to provide a chemical test. He is scheduled for a pretrial conference on Feb. 5 in municipal court.

Rios, who works in an oil field position involved in the hydraulic fracturing of wells, was elected unopposed in 2022 to a four-year term in the state House of Representatives. □

# Ice storms and blizzards pummel the central U.S. a day after Christmas

By **TRISHA AHMED**

Associated Press/Report for America

**MINNEAPOLIS (AP)** — From an ice storm in North Dakota that sealed windows shut to blizzard conditions in Colorado causing hundreds of airport delays and cancellations, a winter storm pummeled much of the central United States on Tuesday, the day after Christmas.

"The heavy snow conditions in the Plains should be slowly alleviating today, but it'll be very slow," said Weather Prediction Center forecaster David Roth. "Even when the snow ends, the high winds should keep visibility near zero — whiteout conditions — for a decent part of today."

Laura Schmidt-Dockter, a resident of Bismarck, North Dakota, wore ice spikes on her shoes as she walked outside to the trash can. Her driveway was sheer ice, she said. A neighbor took to the street on ice skates.

"It's actually not bad!" the neighbor quipped about the quality of the ice, skating by Schmidt-Dockter in a video she posted to social media.

At Denver International Airport there were over 530 flight delays and 23 cancel-



An Elbert County truck with sand passes the closure barrier on Colorado County Highway 86 just east of Kiowa, Colo..

Associated Press

lations as of Tuesday afternoon, according to tracking website FlightAware. Blizzard conditions on Colorado's plains closed Interstate 70 eastbound from the outer edge of the Denver area to Kansas. Travelers were also unable to head westbound into Colorado from Kansas on the highway because of the threat posed by high winds.

According to the National Weather Service, it's considered a blizzard when winds exceed 35 miles per hour

(56 kilometers per hour) for three hours or more, with considerable blowing snow and visibility down to less than a quarter-mile (0.4 kilometers).

Blizzard warnings were in effect mid-Tuesday for western portions of South Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas, along with eastern portions of Colorado and Wyoming. Ice storm warnings and winter weather advisories remained in place in South Dakota, North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota.

On Christmas Day, one person was killed and three others were injured in Kansas, when the driver of a pickup truck lost control on snow and ice and collided head-on with a sport utility vehicle 5 miles (8 kilometers) west of Larned, according to the State Patrol. The woman killed in the crash was identified as Evelyn Reece, 86, of Wichita.

Rosebud Sioux Tribe officials in South Dakota said on social media that some people had ignored the

no-travel advisory issued Monday evening. The advisory meant no one should have been on highways or backroads because of the whiteout, they said.

"We have multiple resources being dispatched to rescue a total of 13 people who ignored the advisory, and then rescue the ranchers who got stuck trying to get to them," the tribe's Office of Emergency Management posted on Facebook early Tuesday, along. Nine hours later, the office gave an update saying the motorists were safe "and all is well." Badlands National Park and the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site in South Dakota were closed Tuesday due to the severe weather.

On Monday, wind gusts howled as high as 67 miles per hour (108 kilometers per hour) in Oakes, North Dakota, said National Weather Service Meteorologist Megan Jones.

The ice storm has affected highways throughout the eastern parts of the state, with Interstate 29 from Grand Forks to the Canadian border closed until Tuesday afternoon, and no travel advised in south-central parts of the state. □

## 1-2-3 and counting: Las Vegas weddings could hit record on New Year's Eve thanks to date's pattern

**LAS VEGAS (AP)** — For better or for worse, a wave of couples saying "I do" in Las

Vegas on New Year's Eve could set a record for the city's busiest wedding day

ever.

That's because 12/31/23 is known in the massive Las Vegas wedding industry as a "specialty date," thanks to the repeating 1-2-3 1-2-3 pattern, the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported.

The icing on the cake? This specialty date falls on a holiday famous for blowout celebrations.

"It's a double whammy," said Melody Willis-Williams, president of Vegas Weddings, which operates multiple venues. "Anytime you get these specialty dates, they're always hugely popular. But tie that in with New Year's Eve and it's a showstopper."

The number to beat on

New Year's Eve is 4,492 the single-day record for marriages in Las Vegas set on July 7, 2007. The second-most popular specialty wedding date on record with the county's marriage bureau is Nov. 11, 2011, when 3,125 couples tied the knot.

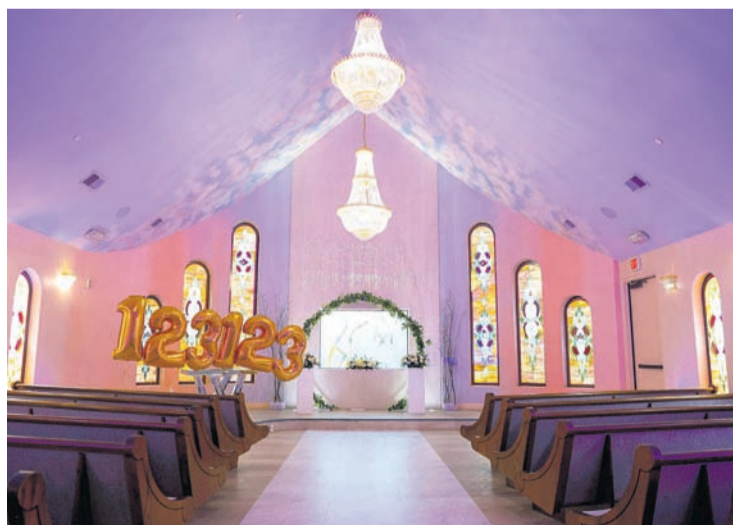
Typically, New Year's Eve has drawn somewhere between 450 to 550 couples to wed in Las Vegas since 2018, the Review-Journal reported.

But not this year for Vegas Weddings. The company is fully booked on midnight at its multiple venues, including its brown-brick chapel in downtown Las Vegas with a white steeple and

red awning.

Willis-Williams said her company alone expects to wed more than 120 couples on New Year's Eve. Five of those couples will tie the knot just as the clock is counting down to midnight. Clark County Clerk Lynn Marie Goya said couples married on a specialty date in Las Vegas have described them as "magic dates" that are easy to remember.

"I think the celebration that has a group dynamic is really appealing," Goya said. "When everyone is in line and they're all getting married and excited about being in love, it just enhances their own experience." □



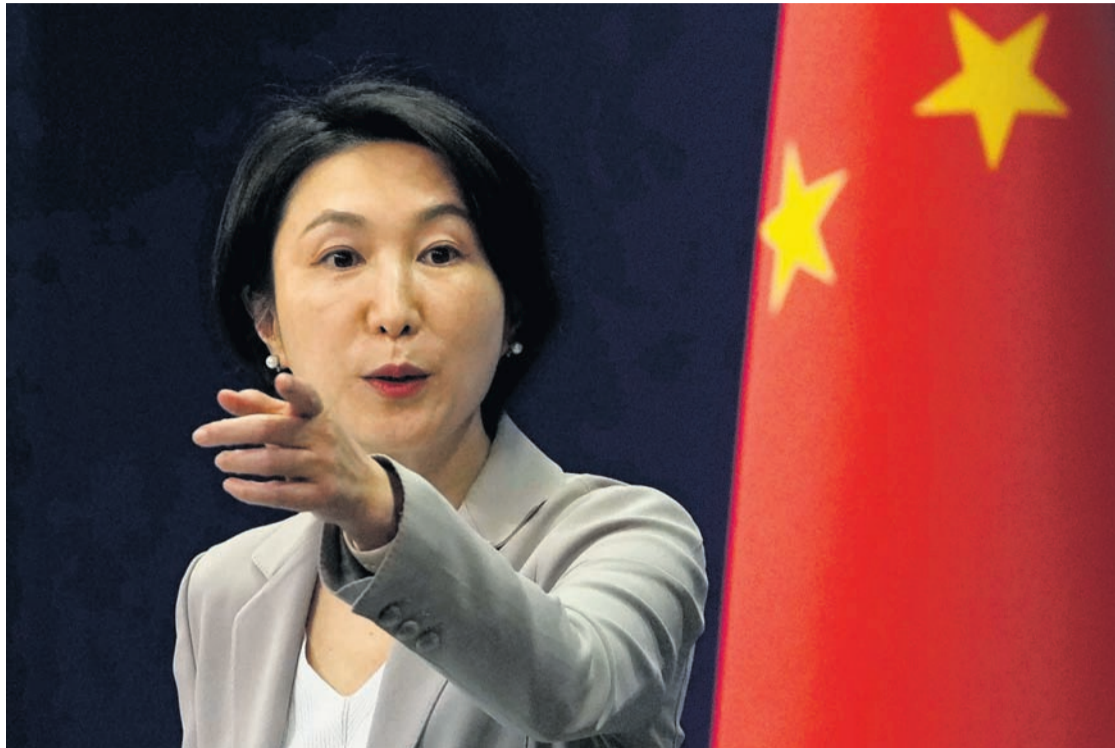
Decorations adorn The Wedding Chapel at Vegas Weddings on Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2023, in Las Vegas.

Associated Press

## China sanctions a U.S. research firm and 2 individuals over reports on human rights abuses in Xinjiang

**BEIJING (AP)** — China says it is banning a United States research company and two analysts who have reported extensively on claims of human rights abuses committed against Uyghurs and other Muslim minority groups native to the country's far northwestern region of Xinjiang.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning was quoted as announcing late Tuesday night that Los Angeles-based research and data analytics firm Kharon, its director of investigations, Edmund Xu, and Nicole Morgret, a human rights analyst affiliated with the Center for Advanced Defense Studies, would be barred from traveling to China. Also, any assets or property they have in China will be frozen and organizations and individuals in China are prohibited from making transactions or otherwise cooperating with them. In a statement on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, Mao said the sanctions against the company, Xu and Morgret were retaliation for a yearly U.S. gov-



Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning gestures during a press conference at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing, on July 26, 2023.

ernment report on human rights in Xinjiang. Uyghurs and other natives of the region share religious, linguistic and cultural links with the scattered peoples of Central Asia and have long resented the Chinese Communist Party's heavy-handed control and attempts to assimilate them with the

majority Han ethnic group. In a paper published in June 2022, Morgret wrote, "The Chinese government is undertaking a concerted drive to industrialize the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), which has led an increasing number of corporations to establish manufacturing opera-

tions there. This centrally-controlled industrial policy is a key tool in the government's efforts to forcibly assimilate Uyghurs and other Turkic peoples through the institution of a coerced labor regime." Such reports draw from a wide range of sources, including independent me-

dia, non-governmental organizations and groups that may receive commercial and governmental grants or other outside funding.

China has long denied such allegations, saying the large-scale network of prison-like facilities through which passed hundreds of thousands of Muslim citizens were intended only to rid them of violent, extremist tendencies and teach them job skills.

Former inmates describe harsh conditions imposed without legal process and demands that they denounce their culture and sing the praises of President Xi Jinping and the Communist Party daily.

China says the camps are all now closed, but many of their former inmates have reportedly been given lengthy prison sentences elsewhere.

Access to the region by journalists, diplomats and others is tightly controlled, as is movement outside the region by Uyghurs, Kazaks and other Muslim minorities. □

Associated Press

## U.S. ambassador thanks Japan for defense upgrade and allowing a Patriot missile sale to US

By **MARI YAMAGUCHI**

Associated Press

**TOKYO (AP)** — U.S. Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel praised Japan's contribution to drastic "reform and modernization" of their alliance, particularly its military capability and spending, as well as a decision to allow Japanese-made Patriot guided missiles to be shipped to the United States to make up for its decreasing inventory. In a meeting with Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara on Wednesday, Emanuel noted a series of steps Japan has taken to bolster its military power and the countries' alliance, saying it brings the "level of deterrence to capital D deterrence."

In the latest move, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government on Friday eased its postwar ban on lethal weapons

exports, a move seen as a major break from Japan's postwar self-defense-only principle. It also approved a 16.5% increase in defense

spending next year to a record 7.95 trillion-yen (\$56 billion) with a focus on missile strike and defense capabilities.

The revision to the arms transfer policy allows Japan to export weapons and components made in Japan under foreign licenses to the licensing nations. It's also a first major revision of Japan's arms export ban since an earlier easing on non-lethal weapons transfer in 2014. Kishida's government is currently in the process of further easing the policy to allow sale to third countries of jointly developed lethal weapons, like a next-generation fighter jet Japan is co-developing with Britain and Italy. Japan on Friday quickly

approved a U.S. request for shipment of surface-to-air Patriot guided missiles produced in Japan under an American license to complement U.S. inventory, prompting speculation they may be sent to Ukraine. Kihara said Tuesday the two sides were still discussing details as officials need to carefully make production and shipment plans so "this will not make a hole in the defense of Japan."

Pacifist groups, academics and some opposition lawmakers in Japan have questioned why Tokyo is selling the Patriot missiles. Critics say it also needs to fortify its missile strike and defense capabilities to be able to cope with an increasingly assertive China. □



A member of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force stands guard next to a surface-to-air Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missile interceptor launcher vehicle in Funabashi, east of Tokyo, on Jan. 18, 2018.

Associated Press

## U.N. appoints a former Dutch deputy premier and Mideast expert as its Gaza humanitarian coordinator

By **EDITH M. LEDERER**  
Associated Press

**UNITED NATIONS (AP)** — Sigrid Kaag, the Netherlands' former deputy prime minister and a Mideast expert, was appointed the U.N. coordinator for humanitarian aid to war-torn Gaza, the United Nations chief announced Tuesday.

The announcement by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres follows the Security Council's adoption of a resolution on Friday requesting him to expeditiously appoint a senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza, where more than 2 million civilians are in desperate need of food, water and medicine, Guterres said. Kaag, who speaks fluent Arabic and five other languages, "brings a wealth of experience in political, humanitarian and development affairs as well as in diplomacy" to her new post. She is expected to start on Jan. 8. "She will facilitate, coordinate, monitor, and verify humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza," he said, adding that Kaag will



**Netherlands' Sigrid Kaag arrives for a meeting of eurozone finance ministers at the European Council building in Brussels, Monday, May 15, 2023.**

Associated Press

also establish a U.N. mechanism to accelerate aid deliveries "through states which are not party to the conflict." Gaza's entire 2.3 million population is in food crisis, with 576,000 people at catastrophic or starvation levels and the risk of famine is "increasing each

day," according to a report released last Thursday by 23 U.N. and nongovernmental organizations. It blamed the widespread hunger on insufficient aid entering Gaza. Israel stopped all deliveries of food, water, medicine and fuel into Gaza after

the militant Hamas group's Oct. 7 incursion into southern Israel that killed about 1,200 people. The Israel-Hamas war has so far killed more than 20,900 people in Gaza, two-thirds of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-

run Gaza, which doesn't differentiate between civilians and combatants among the dead.

After U.S. pressure, Israel allowed a trickle of aid in through Egypt, but U.N. agencies say that for weeks, only 10% of food needs has been entering Gaza. Last week, Israel opened the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza and truck traffic increased but an Israeli strike on Thursday morning on the Palestinian side of the crossing stopped aid pickups, the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, or UNRWA, said.

Kaag has for years worked in the Middle East, including in the Palestinian territories. She started working for the United Nations in 1994 in Sudan and has worked for UNRWA and as regional director for the Mideast for the U.N. children's agency UNICEF. She also served as assistant director of the U.N. Development Program, headed the U.N. mission to destroy Syria's chemical weapons, and was U.N. special envoy for Lebanon until October 2017. □

## Opposition candidate in Congo alleges police fired bullets as protesters seek re-do of election

By **SAM MEDNICK**  
Associated Press

**KINSHASA, Congo (AP)** — A main opposition candidate in Congo accused police of using live bullets to break up a protest Wednesday in the capital, as demonstrators demanded a re-do of last week's presidential election.

Holding up a bullet, Martin Fayulu told The Associated Press that it landed near him while he was barricaded inside his headquarters during a standoff with police. His claim could not be verified.

Police said no live bullets were used, only tear gas, and that they were restoring order. AP journalists saw police physically assaulting some of the protesters.

Fayulu is one of five opposi-

tion candidates who called the protest.

Some rights groups and international observers also have questioned the vote

and alleged it was extended illegally. Many polling stations were late in starting, and some didn't open at all. Some lacked materi-

als, and many voter cards were illegible as the ink had smudged.

In some parts of Congo, people were still voting five days after the election.

"I feel bad this is not a country anymore," Fayulu said, adding that Congolese will not accept it if President Felix Tshisekedi is declared the winner of another term. If there is no revote, the demonstrations will continue, Fayulu said.

As of Tuesday evening, Tshisekedi had nearly 79% of the vote, opposition leader and businessman Moise Katumbi had about 14% and Fayulu had about 4% of some 6 million counted votes. The final results are expected before the new year.

Tshisekedi has spent much

of his time in office trying to gain legitimacy after a disputed 2018 election, where some observers said Fayulu was the rightful winner. Some 44 million people almost half the population had been expected to vote in this year's contest.

The electoral observation mission of the National Episcopal Conference of Congo and the Church of Christ in Congo said more than 27% of voting stations didn't open and there were 152 reports of violence, confrontations or brawls. That's based on a sampling of 1,185 observer reports.

At least 100 demonstrators gathered around Fayulu's headquarters on Wednesday throwing rocks and burning tires. □



**A member of security forces fires during clashes with supporters of presidential candidate Martin Fayulu outside his party's headquarters, in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023**

Associated Press

## Food culture in Aruba

(Oranjestad) - Like many other cultures, an important aspect of the Aruban cultural identity is our connection to food and food traditions. The local food traditions consist of a melting pot of different cultural and religious eating habits and dishes.

### Breakfast, lunch and dinner

The routine of breakfast, lunch and dinner on the island is one that does not completely follow a European or American routine, despite the major influences from these parts of the world on our culture and way of living. When it comes to the three important meals of the day, most of the Aruban population follows a Latin-American influenced routine.

### Breakfast

Breakfast in Aruba is quite simple: a cup of coffee or tea, some bread, and sometimes an egg. Sometimes, due to the need of a quick "to-go" breakfast, you may also find many snack trucks and cafes that sell sandwiches, pastechis (meat pie), arepas and empanadas early in the morning.

### Main Meal

The main meal is typically eaten in most households around noon or in the afternoon. This can consist of meat, fish, and chicken—stewed or fried—with funchi (polenta) or rice with stewed vegetables. Often, fried or boiled plantain or pan bati (Aruban pancake) is included. Stews are a staple in Aruban cuisine and can be largely influenced by Latin-American and Latin/Afro-Caribbean Stews. Some of the more unique stews and soups from the ABC Islands\*



include sopi di bonchi cora (red kidney bean soup with pig tail), sopi mondongo (tripe soup), carni stoba (beef stew), comcomber stoba (West Indian gherkin stew) and much more.

### Dinner Time

Dinner time can vary significantly from household to household. Unlike the U.S. or in Europe, dinner time typically does not consist of a whole (warm) meal. Instead, the evening "meal" can typically consist of something lighter, like a sandwich, though it is not uncommon to see leftovers from the main meal reheated and eaten again. Tea and coffee are often also served with the evening snack.

### (Religious) Holidays

Christmas is probably the biggest global holiday, and every culture has its own spin on what their Christmas cuisine entails. In Aruba, our Christmas cuisine is again largely based on Latin-American influences, most notably from Venezuela. Ayacas and the famous pan di ham\* are two crucial holiday dishes, along with stuffed turkey, roasted glazed ham topped with pineapples, arroz con pollo (rice and chicken) and potato salad, among other items. Traditional drinks include ponche crema (Aruban eggnog), chuculati pinda (hot chocolate with



peanut butter), and homemade fruit punch. Desserts include, bolo di pistachio (pistachio cake), bolo di cashupete (cashew cake), quesillo (flan), bolo preto (dark fruit cake), drigidek (gingerbread), pan boyo (bread cake) and more.

### Snacks and tasty delights

Besides meals and dishes that are eaten on the dinner table, Aruba also has a food tradition that includes snacks and other tasty delights that you may easily find around the island. These include, Saco\*, basket, pastechi, kroket, deditos, Johnny cake and more. These snacks are usually sold at local snack trucks and cafes, often located on the side of the road. In the area of Tanki Leendert and Tanki flip, for example, there are many of these trucks parked on the side of the road and often open until late at night—offering tasty and filling snacks post night-life fun. □

\*ABC Islands: Aruba, Bonaire and Curacao

\*Pan di ham: Derived from the Venezuelan Pan de Jamon (rolled up bread with ham, raisins and olives)

\*Saco: Saco literally means "bag". Saco contains fried potatoes, plantains, chicken (and ribs) and a Johnny cake, served in a paper bag.

Source: Voeding, voedingsgewoonten en gerechten op Aruba (Nutrition, Food Traditions and Dishes on Aruba) by Biblioteca Nacional Aruba

## Aruba to me

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paper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again.

For today we received a lovely message from Alexa Chipps who's visiting us from Washington, Pennsylvania, USA.

She wrote to us saying: "Aruba means celebrating my '23' birthday!"

Thank you for sending us this wonderful message sharing what Aruba means to you with us and our readers! □

# Asian Caribbean Impressions Menu

Spice Up Your Island Adventure

Savor the epitome of fine dining at Infini, where artistry meets cuisine in an intimate setting of only 18 seats per night. Experience the magic as our talented Chef Urvin Croes creates an unforgettable 8-course culinary dream right before your eyes, featuring our exquisite Asian Caribbean Impressions Menu. Elevate your senses and indulge in a symphony of flavors, blending the best of both worlds. Infini promises an unparalleled dining journey on Aruba, leaving you with cherished memories to savor forever.

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## Rhythms Circus Company Aruba: putting Aruba's name on the world stage



**Rhythms Circus Company Aruba is a talented group of young people working daily to present their art in the form of acrobatics, dancing, acting and singing. After an impactful participation in one of America's biggest talent shows, they are now bringing their amazing talent to Aruba!**

In a show full of light, music, and with performances to famous musical figures like Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson and Tina Turner, the group consisting of 15 people from various countries delights the audience with their artistic prowess at the Paseo Herencia Mall, every Wednesday and Friday starting at 7pm. Each day has a different show, so you can attend both nights for the complete experience!

In a show full of light, music, and with performances to famous musical figures like Elvis Presley, Michael Jackson and Tina Turner, the group consisting of 15 people from various countries delights the audience with their artistic prowess at the Paseo Herencia Mall, every

Wednesday and Friday starting at 7pm. Each day has a different show, so you can attend both nights for the complete experience!

RCCA also offers the possibility for you and your family to enjoy dinner before the show! Starting from 6pm, you and your family can delight from the wide-ranged menu that includes a variation of delicious main course meals complete with a delectable flan dessert as a sweet treat. Enjoy your dinner even more at a VIP table complete with comfort seating!

The group, under the leadership of directors and creators Diego Jaramillo and Yamila Hernandez are opening the doors to the ballroom to our local audience as well as our visitors so that everyone can have the privilege of experiencing this wonderful show.

Hernandez explained that the idea for this project started in 2010 when she came to work in Aruba. After being on the island for a while she decided to stay and live here, and she met Diego Jaramillo, who is currently her partner. Together they came with the idea to establish a company together with other professional artists, with the goal of living from their art. Hernandez says that the work is hard – all of the performers are professional artists, and while the production of the show is not a challenge for them, selling the idea proved difficult since at the time, there weren't any shows of its kind on the island.

### America's Got Talent

Currently they are offering a show with mu-

sic, choreography and at the end, they have a shocking acrobatics ending, one that was seen by thousands of people around the world when the group travelled to Los Angeles in the United States to represent Aruba in America's Got Talent. Hernandez said that the show was very important for them to meet the public present because people could experience this performance live and right before their eyes.

Their presentation in America's Got Talent "was incredible" and they were able to meet the jury and many other artists staying there for three months. But the exhaustion and physical toll was so great that Diego suffered an accident, and because of this, they had to cancel all future commitments.

### Reservations and tickets

To make a reservation to see this incredible display of creativity and acrobatics, scan the QR code which will take you directly to their website for a booking. To find more information about RCCA, please visit their Instagram page @rccaruba.



## Blackstone Beach

**(Oranjestad)—Named after its most recognizable feature, the Blackstone Beach almost represents the opposite of the typical Aruban beaches. For one, it has black sand and is covered in black smooth stones. Secondly, it lies on the northern side of the island, away from the white sandy beaches of in the southern region. So, if you feel up for something different—or if it's opposite day, visit the Blackstone Beach.**

Blackstone Beach shows the more natural side of Aruba: the stones that cover the beaches and the shape of it has been crafted for thousand years via volcanic eruptions, coral reef movements and wave activity of the rural northern part of the island. Located further east to the Natural Bridge and

Andicuri Beach, the Blackstone Beach is relatively easy to access. Once you get passed the Ayo Rock Formation, take the Andicuri road leading up to Andicuri Beach. There, you can park your car and take a 1km hike towards Blackstone Beach.

This beach forms part of the Arikok National Park and is therefore a site that is preserved. This is why it is also relatively untouched by commercial influences. Despite being called a beach, do note that it is not advised to swim in the water, as the current is very strong and can easily stray you further in the wild ocean. However, you can still enjoy a spectacular view of the stones and the northern ocean that stretches out in front of the beach and take a picture with your friends or family!



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**Aruba Tourism Authority honors a loyal visitor at Casa Del Mar Beach Resort!**

The Aruba Tourism Authority recently had the great pleasure of recognizing an Emerald Ambassador of Aruba. This lovely lady was honored with a certificate acknowledging her years of visits, loyalty, and love for the island of Aruba.

The honor certification is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism as a token of appreciation and to say "Masha Danki" to guests who have visited Aruba 10, 20, or 35 years or more consecutively.

**The three honoring levels are as follows:**

Distinguished Visitor (10>years consecutively visiting Aruba)  
 Goodwill Ambassador (20>years

consecutively visiting Aruba)  
 Emerald Ambassador (35>years consecutively visiting Aruba)

**The honoree was:**

Emerald Ambassador of Aruba Mrs. Diane Marchese from Nevada, United States.

Ms. Kimberley Richardson representing the Aruba Tourism Authority, and staff members of the Casa Del Mar Beach Resort bestowed the certificate to the honoree, presented her with memorable gifts, and also thanked her for choosing Aruba as her best-loved vacation destination, as her home away from home.

**Top reasons for returning to Aruba provided by Mrs. Marchese were:**



- "It is our family tradition."
- Aruba's great weather.
- Aruba's kind and friendly people.
- Aruba's great restaurants.
- "To relax!"

On behalf of the Aruba Tourism Authority, we would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the honoree for her continued visits to the "One Happy Island".

**The Haggerty's: Another very successful Feed A Dog in Aruba!**



My husband Steve Haggerty and I Susan Haggerty have been coming to Aruba for years! We love dogs and love seeing the dogs here on vacation as well. We started buying dog food at Super Foods years ago and would purchase as much as our rental car could hold. We would bring the food back to La Cabana where they would graciously hold the food for us while we reached out to the rescue groups to let them know we had some dog food for them.

Fast forward to 2023 we raised \$4,700 for

dog food and donated it today to the rescue groups on the island. The rescue groups on the island work 24/7 365 days a year to not only feed the dogs but also give them shelter, cover any medical cost needed and also help the dogs find their forever homes. Over the last 3 years we have raised over \$12,000.00 for the dog food.

The rescue groups we work with are Luna



Foundation Aruba, New Life For Paws Foundation, Sgt Pepper's Friends and Aruba Relief Foundation. In addition to the groups we also gave food to volunteers who foster and feed the dogs throughout the year.

We are very fortunate for the opportunity to vacation every year in Aruba and want to pay it forward as much as we can.

We would like to thank our

friends Skip and Claire Freeman who continue to support us every year with fundraising and man power to load all of the dog food into the vehicles. We also want to thank Just 4 Pet for always willing to help us and this event for the last 3 years. All of our friends at La Cabana who open their wallets each year with a smile on their faces and are so happy to help us. It takes a village to help the Aruba dogs and Steve and I are proud to be part of this village!

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# Paseo Herencia; An exciting destination for leisure and entertainment



**NOORD** — Paseo Herencia, situated in the heart of Palm Beach and within walking distance from the high-rise hotels, beckons with a diverse array of shopping, dining, and entertainment options in an outdoor setting.

### Shopping

Paseo Herencia presents a captivating selection of stores catering to various preferences, encompassing beachwear, apparel, fragrances, footwear, jewelry, keepsakes, and much more. Unwind at Maggy's, indulging in their salon services while exploring a range of beauty products. For a memorable gift crafted from natural ingredients, explore Aruba Aloe's offerings. Iconic brands like Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Aldo, Carmen Steffens, Nike, and Pandora stand among the favorites.

### Dining

Embark on a global culinary journey at Paseo Herencia's diverse array



of restaurants, each offering a unique dining experience. From the vibrant flavors of Iguana Cantina's Mexican cuisine to the Spanish elegance of Xixon Spanish Restaurant, the innovative fusion of Pizza and Sushi at Fusion Cuisine, the grilled delights of Skewers Grill, the comfort of The Lazy Turtle, the creativity at Drunk's Denial, and the seafood sensation of Sexy Shrimps Bar, and the familiar warmth of Starbucks, indulge in an unforgettable gastronomic adventure that spans the world's finest cuisines, all within the charming ambiance of our outdoor center.

### VIP Cinema

Indulge in an unparalleled cinematic experience at Caribbean Cinemas VIP, nestled on Paseo Herencia's second floor. Relax in supremely comfortable reclining seats while enjoying movies on high-quality screens with state-of-the-art projection and 7.1 Dolby surround sound. Don't forget to relish the delectable buttery popcorn.

### Entertainment

Paseo Herencia offers live entertainment from Monday to Friday at 8pm on the center stage, as well as captivating nightly watershows at 7:30pm, 8:30pm, and 9:30pm. Thrill-seekers can explore the Airsoft experience, located behind The Lazy Turtle. For picture-perfect moments, capture Instagram-worthy shots at the Angel Wings installation between Pandora and Free Spirit, or amidst the Flying mosaic hearts behind King Churros. There's more fun in store with delightful kids' activities, including a Kid's carousel and train ride, available every day from 6 pm to 10 pm.



Parking is complimentary for up to two hours when shopping, dining, or enjoying a movie at Paseo Herencia. Simply present your purchase receipt to the parking cashier. For more details on specials and events, visit the Paseo Herencia website at [www.paseoherencia.com](http://www.paseoherencia.com).



# Today is going to be a good day

**(Oranjestad)—Here's why: Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Yes, we know. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.**

## Nature Calls



The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the island's indigenous roots. The guided tours are even free of charge. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In Total the park consists of 7907 acres protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whiptail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website [www.arubanationalpark.org](http://www.arubanationalpark.org)

## Philip's Animal Garden



To stay with the animals, let's hop to an amazing place. Something different to do, an experience that is to be enjoyed by people of all ages. Welcome to Philip's Animal Garden. We are not talking about a zoo here, this is actually a sanctuary for all types of creatures, from

horses to peacocks, kangaroos to turtles, monkeys, goats, and many, many more different species. The place was founded in 2009 and it is the only organization rescuing and rehabilitating exotic animals in Aruba, which has resulted in an amazing collection of these animals. They provide a suitable living environment for all the rescued animals. Up until now the owner, Philip, has built this shelter with his own efforts; building all the cages from scratch, designing all structures and welding them with his own bare hands. His goal is to upgrade the facilities to a world-class animal shelter with veterinary care and round-the-clock staffs. With the input from the Aruban community and visitors they provide the best care for these animals. Please check out their website for more information: [www.philipsanimalgarden.com](http://www.philipsanimalgarden.com).

## The Lighthouse



No, you would not think of this as a hidden gem. The California Lighthouse is actually one of the most known highlights in Aruba and many repeated guests most probably took the ride uphill already. But, there is a significant change to this tower. Since September 2016 you can climb the top. In 2015 Stichting Monumentenfonds started the restoration of the California Lighthouse. The project finished in September 2016 and the Lighthouse is now open for visitors to enjoy the beautiful view from the top. The construction of the California Lighthouse started in 1915. The name 'California' came from a vessel of the West India Company and Pacific Steamship Co. called 'California' that shipwrecked in the area in 1891. Therefore they came up with the idea of building a lighthouse that could indicate the island's eastern tip to ships with its light. [www.arubalighthouse.com](http://www.arubalighthouse.com) will give you more information.

## Kayak in the Mangroves



Mangel Halto at Savaneta is definitely a place not to miss out on. The beautiful beach with the natural mangroves is simply a beauty, but if you

are into a more active way to enjoy the nature: take a kayak. While you are doing some workout -as it might get a little windy and rough-, you will see the island from a different perspective. You can even make a stop to do some snorkeling at the reef. Its fun, it's healthy and for sure something else. There are several companies that offer kayak tours, we had good experience with The Shack Kayak Tours Aruba, find them on Facebook.

## Take an "off-road" sightseeing tour



A must-do activity on the island is for sure taking an off-road sightseeing tour. If you have a rented car, you can drive through the north-eastern side of Aruba and explore the natural pools, caves, rock formations and gorgeous view of the Atlantic Ocean. To access most of these sights, like the natural pool (Conchi) and the Guadirikiri and Fontein caves, you must enter through the Arikok National Park and buy a day pass. Then you drive up the rugged road that leads you through the white dunes, caves and along the wind turbines. Other locations, like the Ayo and Casibari Rock formation are situated more in the center of the island, and are free for guests, 24 hours a day.

## Go for a shopping spree in the city center



Need a new bathing suit? Head to the city center of Oranjestad, where there is countless of different stores—both high end and more affordable—that can offer you the service you deserve! Local shopping stores often offer a more affordable price, and have a variety of clothes, shoes, bathing suites, purses and more. Along the Royal Plaza strip, there are numerous jewelry stores with great quality jewelry. In the Renaissance mall, you can shop high-end luxury brands, like Dolce & Gabbana, Kate Spade, Louis Vuitton and more.

Around the high-rise hotel area near Palm Beach, the Paseo Herencia Mall contain a variety of shopping stores, restaurants, small food stands and even a movie theater! □

**CROSSWORD**

By **THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS** 44 Miniature map

1 Diamond corners

6 Sleepy mammal

11 Bert's pal

12 "Beetle-juice" girl

13 Squirrel's find

14 Rival

15 Setting of Thomas Hardy novels

17 Back muscle

19 Caribou's kin

20 Weed whacker

23 Designer Pucci

25 Spigots

26 Rangers' worries

28 Grove growth

29 Frozen plain

30 "For sure!"

31 Director Anderson

32 Method

33 Famed Florentine family

35 Eggs purchase

38 Tadpole, e.g.

41 In the future

42 Supine protest

43 Boxer Liston

**DOWN**

1 Arthur of TV

2 Compass trace

3 Some are studded

4 Cork's country

5 Dojo VIPs

6 Glossy

7 Bobcat's kin

8 Lyric poem

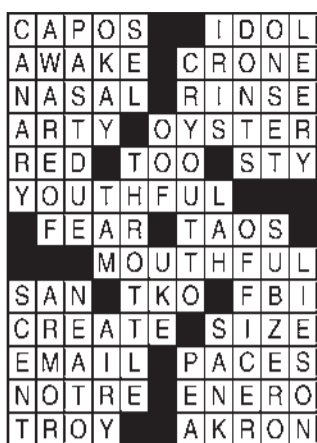
9 Dickens boy

10 Cow chow

16 Like some spoons

17 Southpaw

18 Love, in Livorno



**Yesterday's answer**

20 Makes auto-

matic,

as a

behavior

21 Sung

drama

22 School

paper

24 "Crooklyn"

director

25 Badge

metal

27 Edible

spirals

31 Friend of

Peter

33 Cruel

34 Early

farmer

35 German

article

36 Cry of

surprise

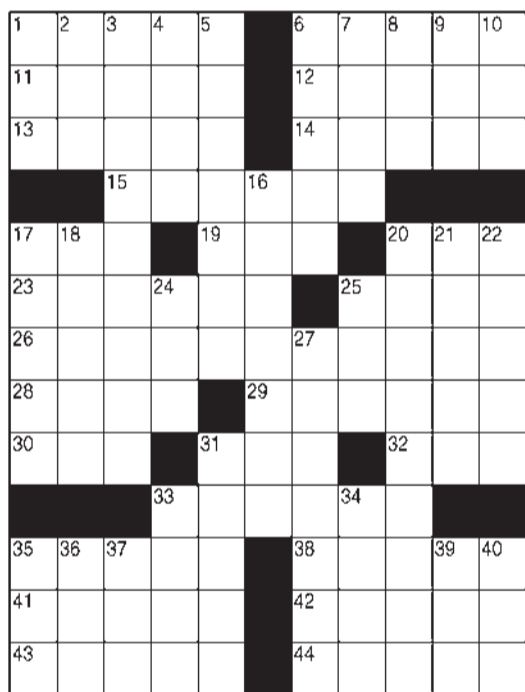
37 Meditative

school

39 Contend

40 Industri-

ous one



12-28

**AXYDLBAAXR**  
is **LONGFELLOW**

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's. X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-28

**CRYPTOQUOTE**

FCJKN NCOQ SUMDJ S NMZJP;  
ELW NLZGXKO'M YDZYXD UDDX  
SN UJDD MZ KDXCQLM CO  
ELSMHDJ NGOXCQLM JDPSCN  
MZ MLDP? — JZND TDOODKW

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: DON'T BE AFRAID TO START OVER AGAIN. THIS TIME, YOU'RE NOT STARTING FROM SCRATCH; YOU'RE STARTING FROM EXPERIENCE. — UNKNOWN

# AI pioneer says public discourse on intelligent machines must give 'proper respect to human agency'

By **MATT O'BRIEN**  
AP Technology Writer

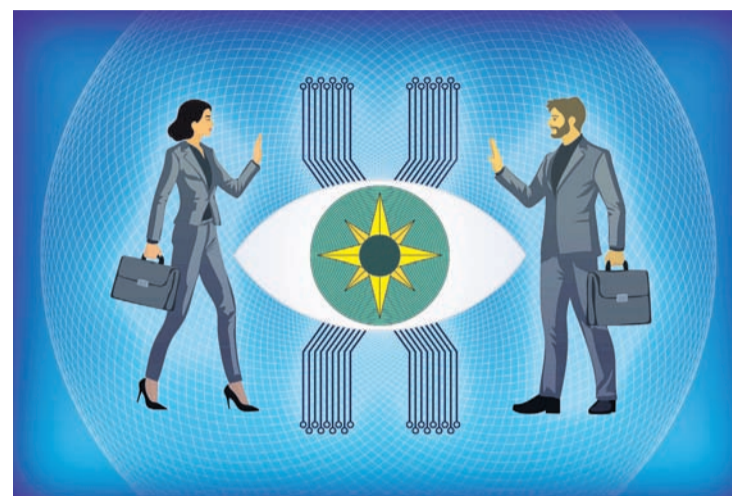
She's an important figure behind today's artificial intelligence boom, but not all computer scientists thought Fei-Fei Li was on the right track when she came up with the idea for a giant visual database called ImageNet that took years to build.

Li, now a founding director of Stanford University's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, is out with a new memoir that recounts her pioneering work in curating the dataset that accelerated the computer vision branch of AI.

The book, "The World I See," also portrays her formative years that abruptly shifted from China to New Jersey and follows her through academia, Silicon Valley and the halls of Congress as growing commercialization of AI technology brought public attention and a backlash. She spoke with The Associated Press about the book and the current AI moment. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

**Q:** Your book describes how you envisioned ImageNet as more than just a huge data set. Can you explain?

**A:** ImageNet really is the quintessential story of identifying the North Star of an AI problem and then finding a way to get there. The North Star for me was to really rethink how we can solve the problem of visual intelligence. One of the most fundamental problems in visual intelligence is understanding, or see-



(Associated Press Illustration/Peter Hamlin)

ing, objects because the world is made of objects. Human vision is grounded in our understanding of objects. And there are many, many, many of them. ImageNet is really an attempt to define the problem of object recognition and also to provide a path to solve it, which is the big data path.

**Q:** If I could time travel back 15 years ago when you're hard at work on ImageNet and told you about DALL-E, Stable Diffusion, Google Gemini and ChatGPT what would most surprise you?

**A:** What does not surprise me is that everything you mention DALL-E, ChatGPT, Gemini is large-data based. They are pretrained on a large amount of data. That's exactly what I was hoping for. What surprised me is we got to generative AI faster than most of us thought. Generation for humans is actually not that easy. Most of us are not natural artists. The easiest generation for humans are words because speaking is generative, but drawing

and painting is not generative for normal humans. We need the Van Goghs of the world.

**Q:** What do you think most people want from intelligent machines and is that aligned with what scientists and tech companies are building?

**A:** I think fundamentally people want dignity and a good life. That's almost the founding principle of our country. Machines and tech should be aligned with universal human values dignity and a better life, including freedom and all of those things. Sometimes when we talk about tech or sometimes when we build tech, whether it's intended or unintended, we don't talk enough about that. When I say 'we,' it includes technologists, it includes businesses, but also includes journalists. It's our collective responsibility.

**Q:** What are the biggest misconceptions about AI?

**A:** The biggest misconception of AI in journalism is when journalists use the subject AI and a verb and put humans in the object. Human agency is very, very important. We create technology, we deploy technology, and we govern technology. The media and the public discourse, but heavily influenced by media, is talking about AI without the proper respect to human agency. □

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# Was 2023 a tipping point for movies? 'Barbie' success and Marvel struggles may signal a shift

By **JAKE COYLE**  
AP Film Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Eight years ago, Steven Spielberg predicted that the superhero movie would one day go “the way of the Western.”

Spielberg's comments caused a widespread stir at the time. “Avengers: The Age of Ultron” was then one of the year's biggest movies. The following year would bring “Captain America: Civil War,” “Deadpool” and “Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice.” The superhero movie was in high gear, and showing no signs of slowing down.

But Spielberg's point was that nothing is forever in the movie business. These cycles, Spielberg said, “have a finite time in popular culture.” And the maker of “E.T.,” “Jurassic Park” and “Jaws” might know a thing or two about the ebbs and flows of pop-culture taste.

As 2023 draws to a close, no one is sounding the death knell of the superhero movie. The Walt Disney Co.'s “Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3” made \$845.6 million worldwide and Sony's “Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse” (\$691 million) was one of the most acclaimed films of the year. Marvel is still mightier than any other brand in the business.

But more than ever before, there are chinks in the armor of the superhero movie. Its dominance in popular culture is no longer quite so assured. A cycle may be turning, and a new one dawning.

For the first time in more than two decades, the top three movies at the box office didn't include one sequel or remake: “Barbie,” “The Super Mario Bros. Movie” and “Oppenheimer.” The last time that happened was 2001, when “Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone,” “Shrek” and “Monsters, Inc.” topped the box office.

No, it's not exactly a lineup of originality like, say, 1973, when “The Exorcist,” “The



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Margot Robbie in a scene from “Barbie.” Associated Press

Sting” and “American Graffiti” led all movies in ticket sales. “Barbie” and “The Super Mario Bros.,” based on some of the most familiar brands in the world, will generate spinoffs and sequels of their own.

But it's hard not to sense a shift in moviegoing, one that might have reverberations for years to come for Hollywood.

“There's an inflection point in 2023,” says Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for data firm Comscore. “Barbenheimer is just one part of that story. Audiences, they want to be challenged. I think the tried and true is not necessarily working.”

Greta Gerwig's “Barbie,” from Warner Bros., was the year's runaway hit, with more than \$1.4 billion in ticket sales worldwide. It was a blockbuster like none seen before: an anarchic comedy that set a string of records for a movie directed by a woman.

Nearly as unprecedented was the success of Christopher Nolan's “Oppenheimer,” a three-hour drama that nearly grossed \$1 billion. As different as it and “Barbie” were, they were each original feats of cinema and personal statements by its directors.

At the same time, the Walt Disney Co.'s Marvel, a hit-making machine like none other in movie history, fal-

tered like never before. “The Marvels” marked a new low for the Marvel Cinematic Universe, collecting \$200 million globally. DC Studios, in the midst of a revamp, saw disappointing results for “The Flash” and “Blue Beetle” before watching “Aquaman and the Lost Kingdom” sink to a \$28.1 million debut.

Both Marvel and DC have already made moves to right their ships. Bob Iger, Disney's chief executive, has called turning around Marvel his top priority. He said the superhero studio has suffered greatly from too many films and series leading to “diluted quality.” The James Gunn, Peter Safran-led DC, meanwhile, won't officially launch until 2025 with “Superman Legacy.”

In the meantime, something else will have to fill the void. That was a theme in 2023, too, when the writers and actors strikes marred release plans and forced the delay of several films including Warner's “Dune: Part Two,” Sony's next “Ghostbusters” movie and MGM's “Challengers.”

Those disruptions will continue in 2024. Analysts aren't expecting a banner year for Hollywood in part because films like the next “Mission: Impossible” film and the “Spider-Verse” sequel, both delayed by the strikes, won't make their

original dates. Overall ticket sales in U.S. and Canadian theaters for 2023 are expected to reach about \$9 billion, according to Comscore, an improvement of about 20% from 2022. The industry is still trying to regain its pre-pandemic footing, when ticket sales regularly surpassed \$11 billion. Output of wide-releases in 2023 (88) still trailed those in 2019 (108) by 18.5%.

Hollywood is still coaxing moviegoers back to theaters something “Barbie,” “Oppenheimer” and “Mario” went a long way to helping.

“It reinforced something that we've known for 100 years in the business: People like going to the shared experience out of the home,” says Jeffrey Goldstein, distribution chief for Warner Bros. “They love being entertained. Movies are a good financial proposition and can bring in a mass audience.”

“It probably started with ‘Mario’ last April,” adds Goldstein. “I think that showed audiences again that theaters are a fun place to be to. And it showed studios and content creators: Up your game.”

If 2023 is any guide, hits will come from increasingly unpredictable places. That was the case with “Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour,”

a film released just two months after Swift's record-concerts in a first-of-its-kind distribution deal with AMC Theatres. It grossed \$250 million worldwide, and was followed by the similarly released “Renaissance: A Film by Beyoncé,” another No. 1 debut.

More surprising was “Sound of Freedom,” a \$15 million film from the independent Angel Studios, which matched Swift with \$250 million worldwide. It was released with a unique “pay it forward” program that allowed people to donate tickets.

Going into 2023, no one was betting “Sound of Freedom” would outgross “The Marvels” or that “Five Nights at Freddy's” would have a bigger opening weekend than “Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny.”

“There are going to be examples of big-budget, traditional blockbusters that do well,” says Dergarabedian. “But for every one of those, there have been two that failed.”

An audience that's finding a lot of interesting material on streaming is becoming more open to films like “Godzilla Minus One,” Indian cinema, Japanese anime. There's a shift in audience taste and studios need to get a handle on this.”

That poses as much of a challenge as an opportunity to studios. If more-of-the-same no longer has quite the same appeal for moviegoers, an industry that for years has depended on sequels, prequels, reboots and remakes to make up the bulk of its profits may require new creativity.

The Western didn't vanish all at once. After two decades of ubiquity, it began going out of style in the 1960s. And the Western, of course, continues to be rich territory for filmmakers. This year, 81-year-old Martin Scorsese made his first Western in “Killers of the Flower Moon,” the three-hour-plus \$200 million epic from Apple Studios. □



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## Brissett to start for the Commanders against the 49ers after Howell was pulled from the last 2 games

By **STEPHEN WHYNO**  
AP Sports Writer

**ASHBURN, Va. (AP)** — Jacoby Brissett is set to start at quarterback for the Washington Commanders on Sunday when they host the NFC-leading San Francisco 49ers, a decision coach Ron Rivera framed as a chance for Sam Howell to get a breather late in a long season with the team long out of playoff contention. Brissett takes over after Howell was pulled from each of the past two games, most recently a 30-28 loss at the New York Jets in which he was 6 of 22 with two interceptions. The 31-year-old journeyman is on track to be the 13th different QB to start for Washington since 2018, and at least one more could be coming next season when new ownership puts another regime in charge. For now, it's the abandon-

ment of Rivera's nearly year-long plan to see if Howell could be the future of the franchise at football's most important position, which included bringing in Eric Bienemy to be offensive coordinator and spanned the sale of the team.

"I think this is probably a good opportunity for Sam to take a break," Rivera said Wednesday before practice.

"This is about Sam's continued development, and things hadn't gone as well as we would have liked for him the last few weeks, so we just think this is a good opportunity for him to watch."

Howell started the first 15 games of the season, and he leads the league with 17 interceptions. The 2022 fifth-round pick out of North Carolina has been sacked a league-high 60 times

and has thrown 557 passes, second only to Patrick Mahomes.

The Commanders have lost six in a row to fall to 4-11. The 49ers opened as 13 1/2-point favorites on FanDuel Sportsbook coming off their home loss to Baltimore, before the shift to Brissett made them 12 1/2-point favorites.

"He's going to give us a chance to really be successful," receiver Terry McLaurin said. "He's pretty much seen it all at this point in his career, so we're excited to get out there and play with him."

Rivera said he let owners know about his decision, adding: "The big thing everybody has to understand is that they have been very supportive of everything that we have done so far." Howell said he was disappointed to learn he lost the starting job.



Washington Commanders quarterback Jacoby Brissett (12) passes against the New York Jets during the third quarter of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 24, 2023, in East Rutherford, N.J.

Associated Press

"It is what it is," Howell said. "Just going to try to do whatever I can to continue to get better these last two weeks and try to learn as much as I can, watch Jacoby play, support him and try to be a good teammate." After four seasons running

Washington's football operations, Rivera and much of the front office and coaching staff are expected to be fired next month as Josh Harris' group puts its stamp on the team it paid \$6.05 billion to buy from former owner Dan Snyder. □

## Naomi Osaka hits practice court to prepare for her tennis return at the Brisbane International

**BRISBANE, Australia (AP)**

— Former No. 1 and new mom Naomi Osaka hit the practice court Wednesday ahead of the Brisbane International as she prepared for her much anticipated return to tennis.

Osaka will make her WTA comeback at the tournament which begins Sunday at Pat Rafter Arena. A two-time Australian and U.S. Open champion, Osaka pulled out of last year's Australian Open in Melbourne before later revealing she was pregnant.

The U.S.-based Japanese player and her American rapper boyfriend Cordae became parents to daughter Shai in Los Angeles in

July.

Osaka has only played one game since the 2021 U.S.

Open in New York. She was leading Daria Gavrilova 1-0 at the Pan Pacific Open in



Naomi Osaka of Japan practices during a training session ahead of the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane, Australia, Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2023.

Associated Press

Tokyo in September 2021, before the Australian suffered a serious knee injury and had to retire in the match.

"She's really pumped, excited to be back in Brisbane," tournament director Cameron Pearson said Wednesday. "She arrived Christmas morning and was out practicing a few hours later. No Christmas pudding for her, she was straight into it."

Rafael Nadal is also set to return from injury in Brisbane in a 32-man ATP field so strong that Wimbledon finalist Matteo Berrettini and 2020 U.S. Open champion Dominic Thiem will have to qualify to feature in it.

Thiem made the Australian Open final in 2020 and Berrettini was a semifinalist two years later. Both are currently sitting outside the top-60 cutoff mark which received automatic entry into the season-opening event.

Holger Rune, at No. 8, is the highest-ranked male in the tournament. American Ben Shelton and three-time Grand Slam singles champion Andy Murray are also entered.

Reigning Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka, Elena Rybakina, Jelena Ostapenko, Victoria Azarenka, Sofia Kenin and Sloane Stephens are in the 54-player women's draw. □

# Pistons lose NBA single-season record 27 straight games, falling to Nets 118-112

By **LARRY LAGE**  
AP Sports Writer

**DETROIT (AP)** — The Detroit Pistons have made NBA history.

Detroit became the league's first team to lose 27 straight games in a season, falling 118-112 to the Brooklyn Nets on Tuesday night.

"Is it heavy? Yeah, I would imagine for everybody it is," said Pistons first-year coach Monty Williams, a former NBA coach of the year. "Nobody wants this kind of thing attached to them."

"I was brought in here to change this thing. It's probably the most on me than anybody. Players are play-



Detroit Pistons forward Kevin Knox II, from left, guard Marcus Sasser, forward Ausar Thompson and forward Bojan Bogdanovic sit on the bench during the fourth quarter of a 118-112 loss to the Brooklyn Nets, an NBA record 27th straight loss, Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2023, in Detroit.

Associated Press

ing their hearts out. I got to get them in a position where they don't feel tight or heavy."

The Nets beat the Pistons on Saturday in Brooklyn, handing them their 26th consecutive defeat to match the 2010-11 Cleveland Cavaliers and 2013-14 Philadelphia 76ers for the most losses in a row within one season.

Detroit no longer shares the unwanted mark.

Next up is the overall record of 28 straight losses, set by the Philadelphia 76ers from late in the 2014-15 season through early 2015-16.

At least matching the record seems likely with a game Thursday night against the NBA-leading Boston Celtics on the road. The game against Brooklyn, like the season, started with some hope.

Detroit led 9-1 and had a 14-point lead in the first quarter before poor shooting, defense coupled with turnovers paved the way for Brooklyn to extend the Motor City's misery.

The Nets outscored the Pistons by 13 in the second quarter to lead 61-54 at halftime.

Cade Cunningham scored 18 of his 41 points in the third quarter and made a 3-pointer early in the fourth to give Detroit a 97-92 lead. Just as fans who nearly filled Little Caesars Arena started cheering with passion heard at a playoff game, the Nets went on a 13-0 run to take the lead for good.

"I've been through tough playoff losses, and this is relative to that," said Williams, who led Phoenix and New Orleans to postseason appearances.

"When you lose a playoff game, when you get eliminated, this kind of feels like that."

Cunningham did his part to give the team a shot to finally win, but he didn't have much help and even he had a turnover late in the game that appeared to be unforced. □



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